

June 2013

Comments on Self-Publishing from a Small-Press Publisher

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Recommended Citation

Litwin, Rory (2013) "Comments on Self-Publishing from a Small-Press Publisher," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 25: Iss. 3, Article 12.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6519>

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adult novel when I joined the staff and had been invited to hold a reading and Q&A that would be led by one of the editors of the student arts journal. Because it's only natural that we should collect the works of authors we invite to read at **Powell, Stasse's** novel was included in the Recent Fiction Collection.

Once I had settled into my job, **Kelly**, having set a precedent for staff readings with **Lisa Stasse**, asked if I wanted to hold a reading for *Other Life Forms*. Relieved and excited, I sat down with her to discuss logistics. Was it reasonable for the library to obtain a copy of the book? Of course. What about the conflict of interest? We decided that, even though I collect recent fiction, I shouldn't be the one to place the order; so we're currently exploring other, more ethical ways to add the book to the collection. We haven't dealt with **UCLA's** official conflict of interest policy yet; but the fact that the decision fits within existing policy, is based on a clear precedent, and comes from the head of the library rather than me personally puts us in a much stronger position to obtain an exception. And if the exception isn't granted, then I'll buy a copy myself and donate it.

The conflict of interest policy, while well-intentioned, creates a frustrating barrier to collecting self-published work — not least because, when collecting zines, I must email dozens upon dozens of writers to ask whether they, any of their family members, or any of their students are employed by UC. If it happens that a self-publishing writer has, say, a brother on work study at **UC Davis**, then I'm faced with the choice of asking them to donate their work, not collecting the work at all, or making the case to Campus Purchasing. However, if that same writer is represented by a large publisher or distributor, I can order their work with a few mouse clicks. Libraries simply cannot treat self-publishers like large distributors or publishing houses if they want to have any sort of equitable collection development policy. Many librarians before me have said the same, and it's wearying that we must continue to repeat it.

Still, my peculiar position as both a self-publishing writer and a librarian has given me insight into the questions and problems that arise when large libraries attempt to collect self-published work. One must work around imperfect policies and ask uncomfortable questions. But examining library policies and bringing colleagues and supervisors into the conversation can help mitigate the confusion.

As for me, I'm anxiously waiting to see how many students check out my novel. If even one student reads and enjoys it, then our decision to collect it will have been the right one. 🐼

Endnotes

1. Zines are commonly defined as low budget booklets or chapbooks, often photocopied and stapled by their authors. Zines have their origins in science fiction, punk, and Riot Grrrl subcultures and are a major outlet for feminist, radical, and other marginalized perspectives. **Barnard College** and the **University of Iowa** are among the other institutions whose libraries collect zines.

2. This is not to say that academic research, expert opinions, and critically acclaimed literature do not occupy a vital space in libraries. A problem arises, however, when librarians fail to interrogate the power structures that decide which voices are amplified and which are suppressed in the American publishing landscape. For a deeper exploration of this issue, see my 2012 *InterActions* article, "Stop Speaking For Us: Women-Of-Color Bloggers, White Appropriation, and What Librarians Can Do About It."

Comments on Self-Publishing from a Small-Press Publisher

by **Rory Litwin** (President, Litwin Books, LLC) <http://litwinbooks.com/>

As a small-press publisher in the library field, whose first batch of published books included two that I compiled or authored myself, I have a unique perspective on self-publishing and librarianship. I often work with authors who might consider self-publishing as an option. I also occasionally miss an opportunity to work with an author who chooses to self-publish a work that I respect. More often, however, I work with authors who submit book proposals to us as a part of an effort to "get published" or authors whom we seek out as capable writers to take on projects that we initiate as a publisher. I have acquired some insights into why authors choose one route over the other and can say a few things about our contributions as a publisher that writers should consider when weighing the option to self-publish.

First, I would like to say something candid about how I feel about self-published books in the library field. My attitude toward a given self-published book depends strongly on how good I think

that book is or how seriously I take its author as a writer worth reading. If the book is good and I think its author is making a significant contribution, I feel a sense of unease at the implicit threat that my work as a publisher may be unnecessary. I comfort myself by considering what we could have offered this author that he lacks as long as he is "out there on his own," but the uncomfortable (for us) fact is that self-publishing is a viable alternative for a serious author. Self-publishing is attractive for the author who keenly values absolute independence and is only interested in reaching an audience that is already aware of him. On the other hand, if a book is so bad that we would not have published it or if the self-published book has serious flaws that we would have corrected, I am pleased to see it because it makes

an argument by example for the relevance of publishers and induces authors to submit manuscripts to publishers by contributing to the poor image of self-published books. Consequently, the rise of self-publishing and the profusion

of articles that encourage self-publishing do not trouble me because the more people are encouraged to self-publish their works, the more bad books will be self-published. This factor helps establish small-press publishers like ourselves as a place for books that deserve to be taken seriously.

Not all serious writers feel a need to prove that their work is good enough to pass through a gatekeeper. For example, **Crawford** is a self-published writer whose personal reputation makes it unnecessary to seek a publisher's imprint to establish legitimacy. So with **Crawford** in mind, along with other authors who might be in his position soon, I will make an argument for the role of publishers in terms of the contributions we make that are *not* falling away as a result of technologies that facilitate self-publishing. Authors who are considering self-publishing may want to think about the role of publishers in these terms.

To begin, librarians know that their own institutions often regard self-published books less seriously from a collection development perspective. But aside from serving as a gatekeeper to the "realm of legitimately published books," we also serve, to a certain degree, as a gatekeeper to the structures of bibliographic control and official recognition. Although

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ISBNs are now available to self-published authors, participation in the **Library of Congress'** Cataloging in Publication program is not. Participation in the CIP program means that a cataloging record is produced by LC and distributed through WorldCat. These records also assure that *Books in Print*, and other bibliographic resources list the book. It affords a degree of official recognition. Participation in the CIP program contributes to publishers' ability to work with vendors so that their books are included in approval plans for library acquisition. In this way, publishers use established sales channels that self-publishers are not able to access (although **Amazon** has changed this to a degree). Periodicals that produce book reviews that buyers rely on usually ignore self-published books. Thus, the gatekeeping function relates not only to the image that a book may have as being "legitimate" but also to the structures of the industry in terms of bibliographic control, sales, and publicity.

In addition to this gatekeeping function, publishers make a contribution through their role as editors — both in terms of copy editing and developmental editing. While it is true that a self-published author can hire a copy editor to help prepare his work for publication, most people prefer that the publisher bear this cost. Perhaps the crux of decision on whether to work with a publisher or to do it on one's own depends upon the question of developmental editing. Many authors who choose to self-publish their works go that route primarily because they want full creative control and do not want a publisher's market-influenced judgments to distort their work. In these cases, they may even acknowledge that their sales will be lower if they self-publish but would rather have fewer sales with integrity than higher sales that require a deep personal compromise. I think that this is often a valid sentiment. However, as a publisher, I can also say that maximizing sales is not necessarily our only concern when editing a work (or evaluating a book proposal). We are, to greater and lesser degrees depending on our desired position within the publishing community, interested in the integrity and originality of the books that we publish. We

are often willing to take risks and make choices that are not intended to maximize revenues. Even the most well-established publishing houses take care to maintain their prestige by publishing books that they do not expect to sell well initially. Taking such a risk does not, however, mean that we publish a book unedited. Authors are not usually the best judges of their own work. This is why the editing function is part of the gatekeeping function.

A third role of publishers is in the design and physical production of books. This is an area where self-publishing has gone far toward bridging a former gap. The options that self-publishers have today are not terrible. The books produced by **Lulu** and **iUniverse** are recognizably books and can stand alongside other books without at first glance being noticeably bad (although the cover designs are often terrible). However, publishing houses are still likely to produce a book that looks and feels better in terms of its design and production values because of their ability to bring expertise and resources to bear.

Marketing is another function of the publishing industry. This area is easy to misunderstand as something external to publishing rather than integral to it. Publishers recognize that marketing is a necessary fiscal expense, where self-publishers are likely to market their books using only their personal communication channels. Publishers are able to market books more efficiently owing to the fact that an individual book is part of a list — the universe of the publisher's other publications. The list, in this sense, may be the totality of the other titles published by the company, the new titles in the current year, the titles in a series, or even a grouping of books advertised together. Thus, the marketing role of publishers is also an organizing role that provides a way of thinking about a collection of books and of placing individual books in relation to other books. These actions enhance a book's and an author's findability. It takes money to do this well, but the fact that a publishing house is marketing a collection of books at the same time makes for a more efficient expenditure.

The topic of money raises another benefit for authors — the publisher's financial role in rewarding and sometimes financially supporting their authors. If authors can make more money publishing through an established pub-

lisher than they can do publishing their work on their own, then publishing houses offer more economic support for their creative work. In some cases, this economic support can come in advance of the writing itself and enables the author to write full-time. This is not the case in the library field or in academia in general because expected sales are relatively low. But even in this sector, authors can generally expect higher sales with a publishing house than as a self-publisher and can probably expect higher income for themselves even after the publishers take their cut, owing to the efficiencies that come from operating at a larger scale coupled with higher sales. Unfortunately, these higher earnings are never a certainty.

I will conclude with the role of publishers that is the least well-understood, and, coincidentally, the role that I enjoy playing the most as a publisher — a creative role in terms of initiating and nurturing projects. Many of the books that we have published and are currently working on began with our own ideas. Through our network of creative librarians, academics, and others, we seek and find capable writers and researchers to take on projects that we envision. Furthermore, we often develop ideas in collaboration with writers. We are far from unique in taking this role as a publishing house. It is generally the rule rather than the exception for publishing houses to take a creative role in envisioning projects, getting them started, and guiding them through their development in cooperation with writers. It is not entirely correct to think of publishers as profiting from the creativity of writers, who would do what they do with or without their backing. Often the creative source of a given work is a publisher; often writers and publishers are creative collaborators. This is not exactly an argument against self-publishing because it does not say that without publishers there would be no creativity. I would simply point out that, without publishers, many of the works that inspire us or influence us or that we rely on would not only not have been published and marketed but would not have been conceived.

I conclude my remarks as a little "dinosaur." Clearly the landscape is changing, but I foresee that economic organizations (today called "publishers") will continue to be the most natural way for most of these publishing functions to be contributed to society. 🦖

Rumors from page 24

Chair of the PASCAL Consortial Purchasing Committee for at least the past seven years! Talk about hard work and dedication! Hooray for **Diane** who also directs the annual **LIBRIS** meeting every year. (This year's meeting was hosted in May by **Central Carolina Technical College** in Sumter, South Carolina.)

<http://www.sclibris.org/contactinfo.htm>
<http://pascalsc.org/>

And I forgot! I was reading **Dennis Brunning's** editorial in the April *TCA*, "Whither

Google?" The editorial is about two Google seminars dealing with Google Search and Google Earth and Google's future and how it might impact libraries. **Colorado State University** has apparently archived the seminar in its libguide for Google Search.

<http://guides.library.colostate-pueblo.edu/googlesearch> Worth more than a visit!
www.charlestonco.com

Moving right along, I got distracted. I was going to say that **Anurag Achura** the lead engineer of **Google Scholar** who visited us at the **Charleston Conference** last year is returning as a speaker this year as well! www.katina.info/conference

Was talking to the terrific **Joyce Dixon-Fyle** <joyfyle@depauw.edu> the other day. Poor thing! Her grandson had a terrible fall and had to have plastic surgery because he cut a gash in his upper lip towards his lower cheek bone! OUCH! Of course he had to be hospitalized. **Joyce's** father-in-law (a surgeon) says that plastic surgery on children usually leaves practically no scars. Meanwhile, **Joyce** had commencement ceremonies to attend to as well. Good luck, **Joyce**, and godspeed to your grandson!

Heard that the energetic **Mark Kendall** (Senior Vice President of Sales and Operations

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